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ABSTRACT

This guide provides information about the nature of learning disabilities in higher education and about ways of assisting students with learning disabilities at Georgetown University (Washington, D.C.) to fulfill their potential. The booklet uses the metaphor of a "zig zag lightning in the brain" to describe the erratic thinking style associated with learning disability. It defines learning disability (LD) and examines whether labeling students as LD is a help or hindrance. The guide notes that the learning disabilities found among college students typically involve one or more forms of linguistic information processing. Classic academic symptoms are listed in the areas of concentration and attentiveness, memory, organizational and study skills, oral language skills, testing, mathematical skills, reading, spelling, writing, and foreign languages. A checklist is presented for screening students for learning disabilities. Techniques are offered for advising and teaching LD students, and a rationale is presented for providing accommodations. Georgetown University's policy for accommodating LD students in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is reprinted, and learning services are described. A brief transcript from an LD students' support group meeting concerning their experiences at Georgetown University is also included. The guide concludes with a list of 25 references, 13 suggested readings, and 4 organizational resources. (JDD)

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GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

A Guide for Faculty: Understanding Learning Disabilities

OFFICE OF STUDENT AFFAIRS

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TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Learning Services thanks Father Freeze for strongly supporting our learning disabled (LD) students. We extend special thanks to the various LD students, faculty and staff at Georgetown University for enabling us to include in this booklet accurate descriptions of what it is like to be learning disabled at Georgetown University. Dr. Norma Jo Eitington, Dr. Ida Sue Baron, Dr. Barbara Harding, Dr. Roger Slakey, and Dr. Steven Sabat were members of the Learning Disabilities Task Force whose advice and comments on this handbook were invaluable. Thanks also go to Dr. Steven Schulman and Dr. William Dodson for their expert assistance.

Copies of this booklet are available free to Georgetown University faculty and staff from the office of the Dean of Student Affairs. Anyone outside the University who wishes to obtain a copy may do so by sending a check for ten dollars payable to Georgetown University to: *Office of Student Affairs, 237 Leavey Center, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057.*

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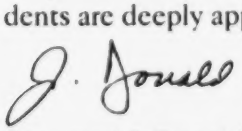
UNDERSTANDING LEARNING DISABILITIES:
A Guide for Faculty

I am pleased to present this guide that provides some information about the nature of learning disabilities in higher education and about ways of assisting our students with learning disabilities to fulfill their potential.

Over the past five years or so it has become clear to me that we have a group of students on campus with learning disabilities whose difficulties are very real. I know, and have known, some of these students personally and I am impressed by their intelligence, talent and drive to attain a good education. Equally clear to me is the fact that many of our learning disabled students do not feel adequately supported as they pursue their education here at Georgetown. In many cases this is due to their own reluctance to identify themselves as learning disabled to their professors. In other cases, however, this is due to their belief that faculty members do not have enough information about learning disabilities to understand their problems. On the other hand, some faculty members have expressed their interest in knowing more about learning disabilities.

In 1986, I asked Dean John DeGioia to appoint a task force on learning disabilities. The Learning Disabilities Task Force recommended that the Learning Services Office in the Counseling and Psychiatric Service produce this informational handbook. This booklet contains the University's policies for accommodating learning disabled students in accordance with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Section 504 of this law determined that a learning disability is a handicapping condition and that learning disabled people must not be discriminated against on the basis of their handicap.

I believe that, given Georgetown's strong commitment to excellent teaching, we are in a very good position to continue to meet the challenge of educating all our students, including those students who often must learn differently. Your cooperation and your support of these learning disabled students are deeply appreciated.



Reverend J. Donald Freeze, S.J.
Provost, Georgetown University

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"ZIG ZAG LIGHTNING IN THE BRAIN" – *Introduction to Learning Disabilities*

A Member of Parliament once described Winston Churchill as having "a zig zag streak of lightning in his brain" (Manchester, 1986, p. 28). This description was intended as a criticism of his judgment, but it also was an apt description of his erratic thinking style. Learning disability specialists now widely believe that a learning disability contributed to Churchill's difficulties in school and to the unusual patterns of his thinking. The metaphor of lightning in the brain is particularly appropriate for describing bright LD people because it can symbolize the unevenness of their insights and intuitive vaults, the boltlike discrepancies in the graphs of their IQ scores, and the relative disorder in their central nervous systems. (Research indicates that the brains of dyslexics differ structurally from the brains of nondyslexics and that they process linguistic information differently [Galaburda, 1987.])

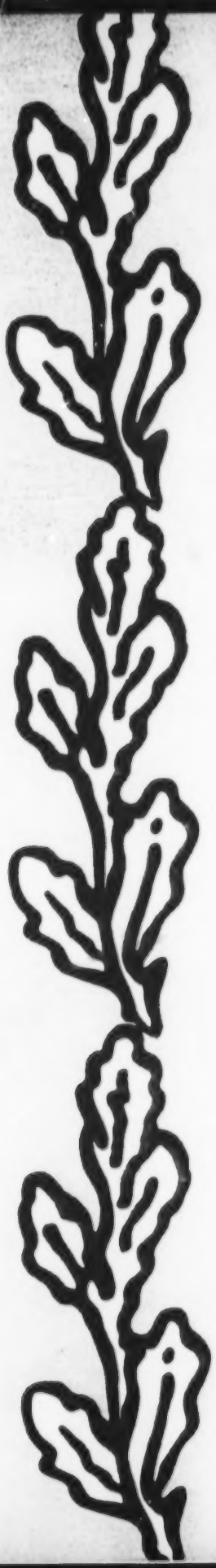
About the abysmal performance on his entrance exam into Harrow, Churchill wrote: "I wrote down the number of the question '1'. After much reflection I put a bracket round it thus '(1)'. But there-

after I could not think of anything connected with it that was either relevant or true. . . . It was from these slender indications of scholarship that Mr. Welldon drew the conclusion that I was worthy to pass into Harrow. . . . It showed that he was a man capable of looking beneath the surface of things: a man not dependent upon paper manifestations" (Churchill, 1958, pp. 15–16). If he were living today in the United States and facing the same examination, Churchill would not have to rely on good fortune to pass because his learning disability probably would be recognized and his education supported.

Other people, who are thought to have been learning disabled are: Leonardo Da Vinci, Thomas Edison, Albert Einstein, William Blake, William Butler Yeats, George Patton, Woodrow Wilson, and Nelson Rockefeller. Many successful graduates of Georgetown, including graduates from the law and medical schools, and several faculty members are learning disabled. A survey conducted in 1989 by the United States Department of Education revealed that 1.3% of those enrolled in postsecondary education programs across the United States reported having a specific language disability. In the general population, approximately one in ten people struggles with the hidden handicap of a specific learning disability (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 1989).

The difficulties caused by a learning disability extend beyond school to the LD person's social and professional life. The continual frustrations caused by a learning disability are a constant strain to the LD person's self-esteem. Most LD individuals, in trying to overcome their difficulties, do not possess

the strength or resources that a Churchill had. In 1982 the National Center of State Courts and the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities found the incidence of learning disabilities among adjudicated youth to be 36 percent. This is just one indication of the suffering and frustration that the average LD person experiences.



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DEFINITION OF LEARNING DISABILITY

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 defines a learning disability as a "disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, write, spell or do mathematical calculations." According to the National Clearinghouse on Postsecondary Education for Individuals with Handicaps, "A learning disability is a documented perceptual handicap which affects the ability to process information in people of average or above average intelligence" (Heath Resource Center, 1987). This is the definition which is widely used among practitioners. As this definition suggests, most specialists believe that the handicap is caused by deviations in the central nervous system.

Learning disability is a broad term that encompasses more specific diagnoses. Despite the fact that the terms "learning disability" and "dyslexia" are frequently used interchangeably, dyslexia is more properly understood to be a specific form of the more general category, learning disability. The preferred term for dyslexia is "Developmental Reading Disorder", which is characterized as unexpectedly low reading achievement given the person's schooling and intellectual capacity (American Psychiatric Association, 1987). Dyslexia's manifestations are not limited to reading alone. Usually, the dyslexic has problems in spelling and handwriting. Frequently, the term, specific language disability, is also used to describe the symptoms of dyslexia.

Other forms that a learning disability can take are: attention deficit disorder, dyscalculia, dysgraphia, dysnomia, and spatial disorientation. An attention deficit disorder is usually manifested by or accompanied by hyperactive behavior. A hyperactive student is unable to maintain concentration and has tremendous difficulty sitting still. A person with dyscalculia has unusual difficulty in grasping mathematical concepts. Dysgraphia, difficulty with handwriting, is usually part of a more fundamental linguistic or perceptual difficulty, but can also be the result of poor fine motor coordination. Dysnomia describes the excessive difficulty that an LD person might have in remembering or using names to express thoughts. Most LD people have inordinate problems using spatial reasoning. This problem would cause a person to get lost and to lack the organizational skills necessary for performing many visual tasks.

Diagnosticians tend to use these more specific terms only when they represent the clearly predominant area of handicap. Usually,

a learning disability affects a person in several cognitive areas. Therefore, the term "learning disability" is used more frequently than the specific term. Also, there will be significant variation as to how the disability affects the LD person depending on the person's particular blend of intellectual strengths and weaknesses. While all people have different levels of ability from one cognitive skill to another, learning disabled people have an extreme disparity in their abilities from one cognitive skill to another.

THE LD LABEL – *Help or Hindrance to Georgetown Students?*

Accustomed to regarding a disability or handicap as a loss or impairment of a particular function, some people tend to be skeptical that bright students can have true handicaps in learning. Many of these skeptics understand readily how a blind person is impaired in the normal function of seeing but understand less readily how a learning disabled student is handicapped in the function of learning. These individuals tend to feel confused by what they suspect is a contradiction in terms – "the bright student with a learning handicap." They wonder in what sense any Georgetown student can be regarded as learning 'disabled' since each student demonstrated exceptional academic promise in his or her admissions application.

Despite the confusion which the label "learning disability" frequently engenders, there is an answer to this question. Putting it simply, although Georgetown LD students possess strong intellectual abilities, their specific difficulties could make it impossible for them to survive in college without accommodations. For those who conceive of intelligence as a global entity instead of a group of varying abilities, the idea of bright, learning disabled students will remain obscure. Another source of confusion is the difficulty in perceiving this handicap. Unlike blindness which is immediately apparent in a person, this handicap is not immediately evident.

The United States Congress brought this handicap into public view by specifying that "no otherwise qualified handicapped individual . . . shall, solely by reason of his handicap be excluded from the participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance" (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973). Final regulations for the implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act defined a handicapped person as having "a physical or mental impairment which substantially limits one or more of such person's major life activities" (The Rehabilitation Act of 1973). The law defined learning as one of life's major activities.

While the term "learning disability" is helpful from a legal vantage point because it enables a number of talented people to pursue a full range of educational options, it is sometimes regarded as problematic from a pedagogical standpoint. Some fear that the term might be used to unnecessarily limit, instead of enable, learning (Coles, 1988). Certainly, there is the potential for students to misuse the term as a self fulfilling prophesy of the "inability" to learn difficult subjects (Sullivan, 1989).

In order to avoid any confusion of meaning that this term might lead to, one can substitute the more ambiguous abbreviation "LD" for the term "learning disability". LD can be regarded as designating both "learning disability" and "learning difference or learning different". If the term "disability" does not seem to fit a genius such as Albert Einstein, the term "learning different" may.

Obviously, this does not address the fundamental problem of determining one definitive set of characteristics for diagnostic purposes. According to LD specialist Reid Lyon (1989), an associate professor of neurology at the University of Vermont and a senior consultant for the National Institutes of Health, it is difficult to define common characteristics of learning disabilities for an all-encompassing diagnostic category; what characterizes an LD person changes, to some extent, from one environment and level of expectation to another. In order to diagnose a person as disabled in learning there must be a quantified, standardized learning rate and method against which to evaluate that person's learning process. It is possible that the difficulties in defining and diagnosing learning disabilities are related to the larger problem of how to define and measure intelligence itself. Howard Gardner, a psychologist who is a leading researcher in intelligence testing, wrote:

". . . current methods of assessing the intellect are not sufficiently well honed to allow assessment of an individual's potentials or achievements in navigating by the stars, mastering a foreign tongue, or composing with a computer. The problem lies less in the technology of testing than in the ways in which we customarily think about the intellect in our ingrained views of intelligence. Only if we expand and reformulate our view of what counts as human intellect will we be able to devise more appropriate ways of assessing it and more effective ways of educating it (Gardner, 1985)."

A likely conclusion to any analysis of the current research and thinking about learning disabilities is that, while professors can benefit from the results of this research, they ought to continue to do what they do best — teach in a way that is as effective and fair as possible. While the scientific community wrestles with theoretical issues in defining the diagnostic category, practitioners in the educational community must constantly make decisions regarding, for instance, the otherwise very bright student who seems unable to pass the foreign language requirement. Accordingly, Learning Services prefers to think of the problem in practical terms by using the abbreviation, LD. This term, while affording the legal definition, also allows the student to define himself in a positive and expansive way as differently **abled** in terms of learning.

"THE FAULTY RADIO" – *Learning Disabilities at Competitive Universities Explained*

The learning disabilities found among students in a competitive college typically involve one or more forms of linguistic information processing. The LD person's difficulty with linguistic information processing lies both in the receiving of sensory data and in the storing of information. When information is not stored properly in the appropriate symbolic form, it is difficult for the LD person to retrieve this information in the form and manner that the situation demands (Velluntino, 1987).

Current research in the field of cognitive psychology indicates that learning requires an interaction between the distinct systems of memory that make up the stages of learning. The initial stage of learning begins when something stimulates the sensory storage system. That system briefly holds a replica of the given stimulus. If we attend to the sensory data, a second stage occurs in the short-term or working memory in which the translated or encoded version of the stimulus is usable for up to thirty seconds. Here the concrete, encoded information is transformed into abstract terms for storage in long-term memory. In the last stage, the information is either lost from working memory or is categorized and stored in long-term memory. In LD people there is dysfunction in the interaction between these systems. This dysfunction causes problems in the storage and retrieval of linguistic information (Velluntino, p. 36).

The analogy of a faulty radio illustrates just one way in which a learning disability might affect the LD student's ability to understand a class lecture. The LD student might process the information contained in a professor's lecture like a radio that had a working antenna which accurately received the radio waves the professor created but that had a faulty receiver and/or speakers which sporadically jumbled the information contained in that speech. Probably, the LD student could have grasped most of the ideas had the spoken words been encoded properly by his or her brain as they were spoken. If the student had been able to read the lecture, it might have been completely intelligible.

In addition to the way that a learning disability affected this academic situation, there are many other combinations of ways that a learning disability can play a role in a student's ability to process academic information. For one individual, reading and writing may be arduous but math easy. Another student may be a prolific writer but have agonizing difficulty with the mechanical process of writing or with the organization of ideas. Yet another student might excel as a learner and thinker when hearing the expressions of the concepts but not when

seeing the ideas expressed. One thing that LD students at Georgetown do all have in common is that they have strong overall academic aptitude which enables them to excel with only minimal academic adjustments to accommodate their various deficit areas.

It is possible to discover these patterns of strength and weakness in a person's approach to information by administering diagnostic tests. One such test is the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-Revised (WAIS-R). This is an individual cognitive assessment which consists of eleven subtests divided into distinct verbal and performance categories. A verbal IQ score and a performance IQ score are generated from the aggregate value of the subtests comprising each category. A full-scale IQ score is a combination of the verbal and performance IQ scores. Unusual discrepancies within the verbal and performance categories and between them are clues that may indicate a learning disability.

It is possible for a person to have an above average or superior full-scale score and have one or more below average subscores. This explains why, although many people expect an inverse relation between above-average IQ scores and the frequencies of learning disabilities, this is not actually the case. Among many learning disabled people, the higher their general aptitude for learning, as measured by the full-scale IQ score, the more specific are their areas of lower subscores. In many cases of higher general aptitude for learning, because of the specificity of these poor skill areas, the diagnosis of a learning disability is particularly clear (Farnham-Diggory, 1986).

Even with above average and superior intelligence, these LD students can have serious academic problems due to their learning disabilities. Many LD students have overcome formidable obstacles in order to gain entrance to the University. As an example, some LD students with dyslexia struggled just in order to read. Then, once these students learned to read, if their reading speed remained slow, extra time had to be spent in each subject. In addition to spending many hours reading, LD students may have spent enormous amounts of time in high school practicing remedial grammar lessons in order to be able to better express their thoughts in writing. Due to their conviction that they have good ideas to communicate despite their repeated mistakes, most of the LD students at Georgetown are very determined.

A learning disability certainly is not a form of laziness or carelessness; nor is it an emotional problem, although a learning disability can cause a great deal of distress (Schulman, 1984). Not surprisingly, teachers are often confused by the erratic performance of their LD students. Like most people, teachers may not realize that a characteristic of learning disabilities is the variability of their symptoms. LD people report that they have "LD days" when they cannot seem to get organized.

On such days the LD student might spell a word incorrectly while later in the week, without having thought about the word, the LD student will spell that word correctly.

In general, it is not clear what initially causes the organic differences that produce learning disabilities. Although certain types of brain injuries do produce learning disabilities, the notion that people who are born with learning disabilities are "minimally brain damaged" is not helpful from an educational or therapeutic point of view. Some theorists believe that learning disabilities are caused by intrauterine chemical imbalances or, among newborns, by an insufficient supplies of oxygen to their brains (Schulman, 1986). A cluster of conditions including left-handedness, learning disabilities, autoimmune disease, and allergies have been linked to high levels of testosterone in mothers during gestation (Vail, 1987). Most studies find that among LD people the ratio of males to females is one to three or one to four. The fact that many LD people had an LD parent or grandparent offers convincing evidence of a genetic cause as well.

Concentration and Attentiveness

1. LD students can have a short attention span, and they are usually unable to maintain concentration in the presence of even a minimal level of noise.
2. Maintaining concentration can be excessively tiring. When studying, LD students need frequent breaks.
3. Hyperactivity and fidgetiness may accompany the inability to focus attention.

Memory

1. LD students will intermittently draw a blank in remembering basic information such as the year, their own age, friends' names or the names of places.
2. LD individuals constantly lose and forget things.
3. Since LD students cannot quickly retrieve names from memory, they frequently use terms such as "whatchamacallit" or "that thing". They have problems memorizing strings of numbers or letters (i.e., phone numbers, lock combinations etc.).

Organizational and Study Skills

1. Time management can be a problem, which often manifests itself in difficulties in meeting deadlines. One reason for this is that LD students are more prone to confuse the dates or times for deadlines (e.g., the fifth instead of the fifteenth or five instead of five-thirty).
2. There tends to be a lack of overall organization in written notes and compositions.
3. LD students can have excessive difficulty breaking down tasks into manageable segments.

Oral Language Skills

1. Students with weak oral language skills can have difficulty pronouncing words.
2. Often there is difficulty expressing ideas orally, particularly on the first try, despite apparent understanding of the ideas.
3. LD people have trouble telling stories in their proper order.

4. LD students have difficulty comprehending while reading aloud.
5. LD students display hesitancy in speaking, or their words come out in torrents.
6. They encounter repeated difficulty retrieving a name or fact while speaking (even the name of a close friend).
7. Many LD students have difficulty following spoken language, particularly in cases of intricate explanations or convoluted sequences.
8. There is great difficulty in taking notes, particularly while following what is going on in class.

Testing

1. LD students frequently interpret questions or directions differently from the way intended by their professors.
2. They have difficulty finishing tests due to their slower rates of answering questions.
3. LD students commonly experience extreme test anxiety.
4. LD students frequently experience mental blocks, or they blank out during tests.
5. LD students can have a very difficult time filling in responses in the correct spaces when using auto score sheets.

Mathematical Skills

1. These students often have an incomplete mastery of basic facts (e.g., multiplication tables).
2. They have difficulty doing basic calculations or make bizarre mistakes (e.g., $5 - 4 = 11$).
3. LD students reverse numbers and confuse symbols such as $+$ for $\times$.
4. LD students typically have difficulties comprehending word problems.
5. These students will copy problems incorrectly from one line to another.

Reading

1. These students have slow reading rates and/or difficulty in adjusting their rates according to material.
2. LD students have difficulty identifying important points.
3. They experience headaches or fall asleep.
4. They have tracking problems (i.e., skipping words or sentences).
5. LD students mistake one word for another.
6. LD students consistently need to reread passages because they cannot focus their attention or because the passages do not make sense due to misreading.

Spelling

1. Besides reversing letters, these students drop or add letters (e.g., kissed for kiss).
2. They are as likely to misspell commonly used words as less commonly used words (i.e., "was" for "saw", "dead" for "dread", "electric" for "eclectic", "nuclear" for "unclear").

Writing

1. These students display poor organization and seemingly careless spelling and grammatical mistakes, despite good ideas which are often well expressed.
2. LD students repeatedly seek extensions to complete writing assignments and write slowly.
3. LD students have difficulty with syntax. Many LD students have weak natural senses of grammar so that, for instance, they will have difficulty recognizing run-on sentences.
4. These students have poor penmanship. LD students usually print, frequently in all capitals, because their cursive is illegible.
5. They cannot seem to catch their own errors in proof reading but sometimes can catch the same errors in the writing of others.
6. They have excessive difficulty formulating thesis statements from the details gathered.
7. LD students make inconsistent mistakes in punctuating sentences.

Since the learning disabilities that are seen at Georgetown usually involve difficulties in the use of linguistic information, it is understandable that the process of learning a second language can be very difficult for our LD students. LD students tend to have weaknesses in the areas associated with successful foreign language learning – short-term memory, syntax, and auditory discrimination (Gajar, 1987). The above list of academic difficulties in the mother tongue gives some indication of how difficult it is for LD students to acquire entirely new systems for encoding and decoding symbols and for producing and discerning unfamiliar sound patterns.

Weaknesses in language processing did not make it impossible for Georgetown LD students to master English as children, because the conditions that existed during their childhood enabled them to compensate for these deficits. For native speakers, even the beginning stages of the cumulative process of cognitive development occur by continually experiencing and using English. It has been found, nonetheless, that the acquisition of even the primary language was a struggle for many bright LD students (Dinklage, 1971). Only by having been totally immersed in an environment where their native language was continually used, were they able to master English. New words and expressions were presented repeatedly for them in many different contexts and in multi-sensory ways. There was plenty of time to practice and the permission to learn at their own rates. Unfortunately, these are not the same conditions that LD students face in foreign language college classrooms.

There is a growing awareness among foreign language teachers in universities that the ability to learn a foreign language is more distinct from the ability to learn in other academic subjects than was previously thought (Demuth and Smith, 1987). Kenneth Dinklage, a psychologist on the staff of the Harvard University Counseling Center, was one of the first professionals to identify this group of bright language learning disabled college students. In an article he wrote on this issue, he discusses the first case in which Harvard granted a student an exemption from the foreign language requirement. "The first such case was that of one of the most literate students ever to go to Harvard. He had published a novel and was generally so gifted that it simply made no educational sense to deny him his degree even though his years of trying to pass the required foreign language courses had been fruitless" (Dinklage, 1971, p. 187).

It is Dinklage's opinion that in some cases students cannot reasonably be expected to learn a foreign language because of a learning disability (Dinklage, 1971). Many American colleges and universities are currently establishing policies to address these cases. For over a decade, Georgetown University has granted course substitutions to students on

the basis of their learning disabilities. The University has a system in place for considering course substitutions for foreign language requirements or waivers of requirements. These decisions are made on the basis of a learning disability's effect on a given student's ability to learn a foreign language. A 1983 University of Wisconsin–Madison committee report summarized the results of a survey of 59 American colleges and universities, and of the 53 which required foreign language study, only 14 had no policy concerning waivers in place or under consideration.

It is not unusual to find that Georgetown University LD students have enough compensatory skills to enable them to perform satisfactorily in high school foreign language classes but not to learn in the more rapidly-paced college-level courses. These students often are diagnosed, for the first time, as having an auditory discrimination problem. If a student consistently performs poorly in dictation or oral drills, it may be an indication that the student has an auditory discrimination difficulty.

CHECKLIST TO SCREEN GEORGETOWN STUDENTS FOR LEARNING DISABILITIES

The following checklist could be used as an initial screen for students whom you suspect may have learning disabilities. No student will exhibit all of the characteristics listed below. It should be noted that while everyone has some of these difficulties from time to time, LD individuals have serious, persistent difficulty with many of these problem areas. Diagnosis by a trained and experienced specialist would be required in order to determine the actual cause of these problems. For instance, a person suffering from clinical depression could exhibit many symptoms of a learning disability because of his or her depression.

- ☐ Has reduced reading and writing rates.
- ☐ Alters the sequence of words or numbers such as confusing nuclear with unclear.
- ☐ Confuses letters or numbers, i.e., p for d or 8 for 3.
- ☐ Omits words or word endings such as fly for flying.
- ☐ Exhibits difficulties with handwriting including slow rate, cramped writing, or illegibility or writing.
- ☐ Has difficulty maintaining concentration particularly in the presence of distractions.
- ☐ Confuses directions.
- ☐ Tends to get lost, confuses left and right, up and down.
- ☐ Forgets or confuses appointments.
- ☐ Exhibits erratic speech patterns and has difficulty finding the right word when speaking.
- ☐ Has inordinate difficulty with math.
- ☐ Has high degree of creativity, humor, and verbal skills.
- ☐ Possesses superior higher-level thinking skills, i.e., analytical thinking, creative or innovative thinking.
- ☐ Has clusters of areas of excellence in which motivation is high and compensatory strategies are well honed, i.e., sports, leadership, interpersonal skills, photography, writing, history, computers, math, or art.
- ☐ Has a family history of learning disabilities or dyslexia.

Professors can be very helpful simply by being available to discuss LD students' learning problems in a forthright manner. Previously undiagnosed LD students usually feel tremendously relieved upon learning that there is an explanation for their bewildering difficulties. These students will have attributed many of their past difficulties to other causes such as carelessness, lack of confidence, or stupidity. A Georgetown University faculty member described how the reactions of his teachers many years ago made him feel about himself since they did not know that he had dyslexia: "When I was a student it was unknown. At least my teachers knew nothing about it. I was repeatedly told that I was lazy, indifferent, inattentive, and because I was none of those, I assumed that I was stupid."

As this example suggests, many LD students at Georgetown, despite considerable achievements, will secretly fear that they really do not b ong at Georgetown. These students are in a better position to clear these misconceptions when they discover that their brains process information a bit differently. The diagnosis of a learning disability can be the missing piece of the puzzle that fits into the person's self-concept to make it more complete and more clear. With this truer self-image, the LD student can drop some old emotional baggage and attempt new things that before seemed impossible (Schulman, 1984).

Even those students who had been identified as LD as children often do not clearly understand how their learning disabilities affect them in college. Until recently, it was commonly believed that with effective remediation children outgrew learning disabilities by the time they graduated from high school. It has been only in the last few years that psychologists have begun to study the effect of learning disabilities on adults.

Georgetown University students with learning disabilities typically grow up very determined to succeed. Many of them began to succeed in school after having received some remedial help, often in their school's special education services room. The stigma attached to being separated from peers in order to receive remedial services drove many bright LD kids to vow to "keep out of that room." Later, many LD students will actively deny the persistence of the influence of a learning disability because of that painful experience. However, LD people constantly feel the discrepancy between their specific deficits and their overall intellectual abilities. This feeling compels many to prove their

intelligence repeatedly. Some LD students become brittle and overly serious because they lack the self-acceptance and self-assurance needed to exercise their talents in natural ways (Schulman, 1984).

Many of these supposedly "cured" LD students, proud of their abilities and stubborn, may not know whether to react in relief or in disbelief to a professor's suggestion that a learning disability may be affecting their college course work. Such an LD student might react defensively, envisioning a return to that special education room of long ago. Fortunately, by college, students are better equipped intellectually and emotionally to evaluate their strengths and weaknesses and to develop more accepting and flexible approaches towards their lives (Schulman, 1984). By admitting that some information processing deficit persists, students are free to try harder in some things and to stop trying so hard in other areas.

Many LD students could use help also in learning to become their own advocates in positive, matter-of-fact ways. A learning disability should be a source of neither shame nor pride. Many students will be afraid to tell a professor about a learning disability or ashamed to say that they need help due to one. They fear that faculty members will be suspicious, unsympathetic, inflexible, or overly protective.

Other students will romanticize about being LD, imagining it to be a sign of creative genius. Students will sometimes fantasize that learning disabilities represent some mystical type of intelligence: "It was Einstein's learning disability that enabled him to think in creative ways in order to develop his theory of relativity." This sort of unrealistic self-concept is often the basis of rationalizations: "I am constantly late and unreliable because I am an artistic person and have a learning disability that makes me disorganized." These romantic notions make it difficult for LD people to strategize constructively about their difficulties in certain areas.

We now know that LD people must learn to accept their disabilities as relatively normal problems or variations in order to be able to maximize their potential. Just as color-blind people must take into account their color blindness in negotiating their way through life, so LD people must, on a daily basis, take into account the difficulties they have in performing certain tasks.

DOs AND DON'Ts WHEN ADVISING LD STUDENTS

Do	Express that you are supportive of their needs to learn in different ways.
Do Not	Feel sorry for them or suspicious of their motives.
Do	Indicate to these students that you have general understanding of the effects of learning disabilities on students at Georgetown University.
Do Not	Feel that you are unqualified to discuss learning strategies with these students because of their "mysterious disabilities".
Do	Demonstrate your interest in working with these students to see how their learning disabilities affect their learning of the material in your classes. Indicate that your discussions will remain strictly confidential.
Do Not	Assume that these students always recognize, understand or acknowledge how their learning disabilities affect them in your classes or that they automatically know the best ways to compensate for the difficulties they might have in your classes.
Do	Make it clear to these students that you are holding them to the same standards of excellence as everyone else in terms of what you expect them to produce in your classes.
Do Not	Act as though allowing for certain accommodations in how LD students fulfill assignments or take tests is an unfair advantage for those students.

Helping LD students learn takes some detective work. While requiring these students to plan and strategize for themselves, the ideal approach would be to act as a co-investigator searching for clues to reveal how to solve the learning problems that these students are having in your subject. It may become clear from your contacts with an LD student that he or she is having trouble following discussions that are marked by intuitive leaps, metaphors, and humor. Or you may be able to ascertain that an LD student needs visual aides and more organized note sets in order to master complex material. A star next to main points may be all that a student requires in order to organize the information into a form that he or she can learn.

In the Classroom

Although most professors already employ the following strategies to make learning easier for all their students, these techniques are mentioned since they are particularly helpful for LD students.

- In advance of the initial meeting time of class, make available course outlines since they are particularly helpful for LD students.
- Announce your availability to suggest specific study approaches relevant to your subject and most appropriate to each student's own learning style. Time spent one to one is particularly helpful.
- At the start of the semester, identify the main ideas that students should learn from the course. Outline the way you will present material and grade students on all assignments during the semester. Present due dates for all assignments as far in advance as possible. LD students often require more time to complete reading assignments.
- Begin each period by stating the objectives and structure of that lecture. List on the chalkboard ahead of time the main points of your lecture.
- When talking, be mindful of the speed and audibility of your lecture. The consistent use of pauses or voice inflections can be effective in emphasizing important points. Permit LD students to use tape recorders in class.

- When possible, use multi-sensory teaching techniques in presenting material. When presenting new or technical terms, it can be crucial for LD students to have them written on the board or supplied in handouts. LD students often are completely baffled when confronted with or called on to spell words they have only heard for the first time and not seen before. Assignments and directions should be presented in both written and spoken form whenever possible. Also, maps, graphs, pictures, and three-dimensional models often can enable LD students to learn certain information by communicating it in a modality that matches their stronger learning channel.
- Summarize and review the main points of each lecture in a way that helps students to integrate this new material into the larger vision you are trying to impart in that course.
- Encourage students to use the assistance available to them from Learning Services. (Services are described on pages 31–32).

WHY LD STUDENTS NEED ACCOMMODATIONS

Due to the difficulties LD students have in processing information, the most common problem LD students face is insufficient time to complete their academic work. The Educational Testing Service is currently conducting research to determine how timed-testing conditions affect the reliability of their standardized tests for the LD population (Educational Testing Services [ETS], 1988). LD students are allowed extended time in taking such examinations as the Scholastic Aptitude Test, the Graduate Record Examination, the Graduate Management Aptitude Test and the Law School Admissions Test. For examinations taken under non-standard conditions, the Educational Testing Service currently sends out notices stating that the reliability of the scores on such examinations is questionable. In part because the United States Office of Civil Rights and others have questioned the legality of this practice, the Educational Testing Service is currently evaluating their policies for non-standard administrations of their tests.

Even without the findings of the ETS study, some evidence concerning the effects of extended testing time for LD students is available now. One such study compared the scores of LD students and non-LD students who were administered the ACT and the Nelson-Deney Reading Test (Hill, 1984). This study showed that while under timed conditions LD students scored significantly lower than did non-LD students on these tests, their performances under untimed conditions were generally the same as that of non-LD students. A second study showed a similar result between timed and untimed testing conditions for graduate and professional school students who took the Nelson-Denny Reading Test and the GRE (Sandperl, 1989). The results of these studies suggest that the granting of extended time does not offer LD students an unfair advantage on tests.

Such studies are important because without the data they provide, some faculty may believe that the use of extended time amounts to cheating when LD students excel on extended time exams. These studies give some indication that it would be unfair to hold LD students to mediocre standards in those classes where their disabilities come into play and where they receive accommodations. Furthermore, Bumba and Goodin (1986) surveyed 586 faculty of American colleges and found that three out of four of the respondents believed that academic adjustments should be available to LD students. Over two hundred American colleges and universities offer accommodations for LD students (Hael, 1989).

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY'S POLICY FOR ACCOMMODATING LD STUDENTS IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973

I. Georgetown University will not discriminate against or deny access to an otherwise qualified handicapped student.

II. An LD student is considered a handicapped student. The LD student must declare his or her handicap in order to be eligible for accommodations or special services. When Learning Services has written documentation of the disability by a recognized authority, a student will have declared his disability. The declaration will remain confidential unless the student provides Learning Services with written authorization to release this information.

III. Once the disability is on record with the University, the University will provide reasonable accommodations to assist the otherwise qualified LD student to fulfill the academic requirements of the degree which the student is pursuing.

A. The University may find it necessary in appropriate cases to grant course substitutions for certain degree requirements where these courses are not considered to be an essential part of the program of instruction.

B. Accommodations will be made so that examinations will measure student achievement rather that the student's impaired sensory, manual, or speaking functioning. The exception to this rule is where the function is essentially related to the performance that the test purports to measure.

C. Section 504 does not give a comprehensive or definitive list of the specific academic accommodations that it mandates. Consequently, during the past five years, many American colleges and universities have taken it upon themselves to develop ways to meet the varying academic needs of their learning disabled students. The Department of Education has reported that certain practices have become common in higher education and may be mandated in some situations. These practices for accommodating learning disabilities fall into three broad academic categories: teaching and learning, demonstrating knowledge, and meeting academic requirements.

1. There is a variety of ways to help a learning disabled person learn. Due to the wide discrepancy between the learning disabled student's ability to learn from one sensory modality to another, one of the most effective accommodations is using multisensory teaching tech-

niques. As a good example of this type of accommodation, a Georgetown University learning disabled student was able to make remarkable progress in learning molecular structures in a chemistry class when his professor showed him how to conceptualize these structures using three-dimensional models. Another reasonable accommodation is permitting tape recorders or note takers for lectures. Some LD students may need tutors to reinforce their understanding of the basic information covered in certain courses. Also, the use of special study rooms in the library that provide environments which are conducive to concentration can be very helpful to LD students.

2. A set of accommodations has developed, through the practices of colleges and universities throughout the United States, concerning how LD students take tests or write papers. Granting learning disabled students extended time on tests is the most frequently allowed accommodation in higher education. Professors have also altered the format of tests by changing from a written to an oral format or vice versa to match the LD student's stronger mode of expression. For certain courses, faculty have allowed LD students to demonstrate their knowledge of course material through creative projects such as films, stories, or artistic performances. A frequent testing accommodation is that of allowing LD students to take their exams in private rooms that are free from distractions. Sometimes, these tests are read to the student. Permitting learning disabled students to use computers with spelling checks for writing essay exams or to use basic four function calculators for quantitative exams are other reasonable accommodations that many schools offer. For certain learning disabilities, such as severe dyslexia, it may be considered a reasonable accommodation to allow proofreading of final drafts of papers, including changes that do not alter the contents of the papers. Or, when spelling is not one of the skills being measured, penalties for misspellings are waived as an accommodation on written tests or papers.

3. Common accommodations concerning academic policies involve substituting or waiving certain courses and permitting extra time to complete degrees. Since a significant number of learning disabled students cannot master a foreign language, the foreign language requirement is often altered to permit such a student to substitute a related course in literature or linguistics. Other schools handle this problem by waiving the requirement altogether. Most schools and programs permit extra time to finish degree requirements for those students who, due to their learning disabilities, cannot take full course loads each semester.

IV. The LD student will be responsible for communicating his or her special needs to the appropriate University personnel. The University is

not responsible for making special accommodations for students who have not declared and proven their disabilities. To declare and prove a disability, a student should do the following:

A. Contact Learning Services in the Counseling and Psychiatric Service for an appointment. The Learning Services specialist will assess the student's previous testing and the need for additional testing so that the student's status can be determined accurately.

B. Fill out and sign a release of information form provided by Learning Services which will give: (1) Learning Services permission to forward to the appropriate dean's office information regarding the student's status ; and (2) the dean's office permission to verify the disability with a faculty member and to recommend that the faculty member contact Learning Services for more detailed information regarding the nature of the disability and any need for accommodation.

Student requests concerning course substitutions, altering the format of competency exams, or time extensions for earning degrees should be made to the appropriate deans after the student has completed A and B above. If the LD student has a grievance or wishes to appeal a decision regarding an academic matter, the student ought to follow the procedures for academic appeals outlined in the appropriate University bulletin.

LEARNING SERVICES AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY

Learning Services requires that all LD students provide documentation of learning disabilities from professionals that the law recognizes as authorities. These professionals are either psychologists or educators trained to administer educational or psychoeducational tests and to evaluate their results for the diagnosis of a learning disability. Learning Services may diagnose learning disabilities that have been previously undetected. On the basis of the scores on these tests, Learning Services can advise students about their college course work. Only at the student's request does Learning Services send faculty members letters verifying a disability or providing test results.

If an LD student authorizes it, Learning Services can provide faculty members with an information sheet listing strengths and weaknesses which characterize that particular student's learning abilities and disabilities. Learning Services can also advise professors on specific questions. For example, a foreign language professor trying to find the best modality for teaching an LD student in his or her class may want to know the student's subscores on the Modern Language Aptitude Test.

Learning Services can assist faculty in providing appropriate accommodations for LD students. Learning Services will proctor in the Counseling and Psychiatric Service classroom an exam that cannot be taken with the rest of a class because an LD student requires extended time. Learning Services administers a note-taking service whereby LD students can arrange to have other students in their classes taking notes. Learning Services also administers a tutoring clearinghouse. For LD students who have severe organizational problems in their writing, Learning Services has available a personal computer with a Microsoft Word program including a spell check and grammar check. As a possible accommodation for essay exams, Learning Services provides a blank disk and proctors a student's use of that computer. There is no charge for these services.

The following is a list of the support services Georgetown offers or can arrange to obtain for LD students:

Support Services for LD Students

- Diagnostic testing
- Books on tape
- Academic advising for students and consulting for faculty.
- Readers
- Notetakers
- Quiet study rooms
- Tutor referrals
- Proctoring special administrations of exams
- Study skills training individually and in workshops
- Books on learning disabilities
- LD students' group
- Word processor with grammar check and spell check.

The use of computers can be so helpful to LD students that they deserve special mention. Many LD students have difficulty in writing due to their poor organizational skills and short-term memories. A word processor allows LD students to minimize their memory barriers in the writing process because it allows quick recording of the content of ideas without the demand that the ideas be immediately organized into good sentences or paragraphs. Then, students' poor intuitive senses of organization can be compensated for more easily because they can rearrange their thoughts when they are presented visibly on the screen. These capacities and the spell check can enable LD students to make great improvements in their writing. Learning Services is able to provide individualized tutoring using the Microsoft word processing program.

If you believe that a student has a learning problem that warrants further investigation, please call Learning Services at 687-6985 for consultation. The next task is to persuade that student to set up an appointment with Learning Services. There are several possible strategies for making referrals. Some faculty prefer to express the issue strictly in terms of behavior, never mentioning the possibility of a learning disability. These faculty feel that by stating simply that they have noticed some difficulties that deserve further exploration, they can avoid making hypotheses that could alarm the student. However, there is no best strategy to use in all cases since the approach that is effective for one individual may be ineffective with another. Ideally, the student would come to Learning Services in the lower level of Loyola and would give Learning Services permission to discuss the case with his or her professors. Then, faculty and Learning Services can work together to provide the best possible services to meet the student's needs.

TO BE LEARNING DISABLED AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY – *LD Students Discuss Their Experiences*

The following dialogue was transcribed from a tape of an LD students' support group meeting. It is included in order to give an idea of the common experiences, feelings, and concerns of LD students.

On perceived faculty attitudes about learning disabilities:

AMY (AN MBA STUDENT):

I think that professors tend not to want to believe what they are being told. On the surface they say: "Oh any help I can give you, I'll be glad to." But when it comes down to giving it to you they think that they are giving you an advantage over everyone else, instead of just making you equal. I don't know if any of you have felt that. . .

DAVID (AN UNDERGRAD IN THE COLLEGE):

Yeah, I've felt that with a couple of my teachers. Most of the time they are pretty good about letting you take a test by yourself or when you see them during their office hours, but they won't go out of their way.

On Accommodations:

AMY:

After completing one exam, when I saw the professor, I thanked him for making an accommodation. Clearly, he was not happy about having had to do this. I've got to wonder whether he graded the exam thinking that because I had the advantage of being in a separate room away from everyone else, therefore my exam should have been better than everyone else's.

CHARLES (A GU LAW STUDENT):

I never had that problem. At the law school they just assign you a number to place on top of your exam and grade it without even knowing your name. So no one ever knows that I take extra time on an exam.

When I was at BU my sophomore year, I was taking my exams untimed, but never had to put my name at the top since my classes were large. Then I got an 'A' in a sociology class and I decided to tell all my professors everything. When I told

my sociology professor I had a learning disability, she said "No you don't; you could not have a learning disability and get a 'A' in my class." So from that point I haven't told anyone I'm LD. I just see the negatives. The only positive I see is getting extra time. But the negatives are that, from the start, they won't take me seriously. Or the professor will go too far to help me out.

AMY:

I have a professor who has not been tested but just knows he is dyslexic. I went to him to have a separate quiet room to take my exam. He said he'd prefer not to give me the test that way. Over the weekend, I decided that I would not let him intimidate me out of getting what I needed. I went back to him and said, "I've thought about it, and I really do need this." He eventually gave me the accommodation.

CHARLES:

Did you ask him why he had not wanted to give you the test in a separate room?

AMY:

He said that he'd rather not because it would be inconvenient. But, you see what I think was really going on for him was that he thinks he's LD; he's got a Ph.D., and no one gave him any accommodations; so why should he give them?

On using labels:

BOB (CAS GRADUATE AND GRADUATE STUDENT):

I feel lucky that I had not been diagnosed as LD in high school because I didn't have to wrestle with the self-concept problem as I was growing up.

AMY:

I hadn't been labeled LD but wrestled with a self-concept problem because I thought I was stupid.

CHARLES:

Yeah, what's that place called? The reading resource room. I think it would have been easier to have known that I went there because of a learning disability.

SAM (SFS GRADUATE, JOURNALIST):

I don't know. A friend pointed out to me that if this had been identified earlier, I probably would have given up on learning to write because I would have thought that I couldn't learn as an LD person. So in a sense, it probably was better. The only time I ever want to make it an issue is when there is a barrier that will actually inhibit my performance. I just want to be treated fairly.

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Higher Education and the Handicapped (HEATH)
One Dupont Circle, NW; Suite 800
Washington, D.C. 20036
(202) 939-9320

National Center For Learning Disabilities
99 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10016
(212) 687-7211

The Orton Dyslexia Society
724 York Road
Baltimore, MD. 21204
1-800-ABCD-123

Northeast Technical Assistance Center (NEATAC)
University of Connecticut
Special Education Center, Box U-64
249 Glenbrook Road
Storrs, CT 06269-2064
(203) 486-4036